

Dear Assistant Director Schletty,

We support an update to the park playground, but the location is problematic. Locating the playground at the North end of the park turns a multi-use park into a single use park.

We have lived in our home (which borders the park) for almost nine years. We deeply enjoy the variety of activities for which we use the park. Further, we love seeing the numerous people and activities that go on at the park.

In the summer, we are at the park almost every day (one of us parents are a teacher and therefore is home summer days). We can look into the park from our kitchen and backyard and we see all the ways different neighbors use the North end of the park. When snow is not on the ground there is a woman who walks laps around the open field because it is a flat and stable surface. A group of young adults hold pick-up kickball games. Last summer we taught our son and his friends to play Kick-the-Can and bought a lawn game set they used in the open field (they used the old warming house cement floor as "the jail"). When we told our 10year old about the proposed new playground, we thought he would be super excited. He surprised us by saying, "NO! Mom, now we can't play Kick-the-Can!" (He later reported his friends feel the same way.)

Our family as well as others have flown kites in the park because there is a way to keep clear of trees. We've also set up a small volleyball net and played volleyball and badminton. We have seen our neighbors play soccer, football (we have even seen a high-school football team practice in the park), tee-ball, and pick-up baseball. Kids love to race down the hill on their bikes into an open field. Adults come to the field to walk, to do yoga, to do tai-chi, and to play games with their families. What we love so much is that the park is used by many ages and in many ways. Putting a very large playground in the middle of the open field will greatly reduce the ways in which folks can use the park.

In the winter, we have attempted to make snowmen and many, many neighbors use the large sledding hill. We are very concerned for the safety of our children and other children using the sledding hill with a playground at the bottom of it. If you visit the park right now you will see sleds go well into the area marked for the playground creating a safety concern and potentially resulting in families no longer feeling safe using this as a sledding hill (a great shame).

Without a doubt, the proposed playground will cut off the multi-function ability of the park.

These days there are very few places where young people and families have unstructured, open places to play and use their imaginations. While we recognize that, to some, an open field seems like an inefficient use of space- we feel the exact opposite. It's one of the only places where the neighborhood kids can go and be creative in their play. We are very sad to see so many activities would no longer be possible at our much-loved neighborhood park. No more kick the can. No more pick-up kickball, baseball, and soccer. No more flying kites. And possibly, no more sledding. No more using the park to walk laps or to peacefully do yoga and tai-chi.

We are not opposed to park improvements and we are not opposed to a new playground. Maybe there are even some additions that can be made to the sides of the field area that would preserve an open space for playing games (a gaga ball court? Tetherball?). What about re-doing the playground at the South end and adding some "natural play elements" by the woods on the North end like the natural play areas in White Tail Deer park or down at Harriet Island (logs and stumps for children to walk across or to imagine as a pirate ship - something that looks nice in the natural environment).

We encourage a broader approach to re-imagining the park. The North end of the park needs upgrades to the quality of soil and sod, and it is in need of a more complete investment in the maintenance of the greens than the weekly mowing of the lawn (AKA weeds). More concerning are the chunks of concrete popping out of the ground throughout the park. An excavation of these materials would improve the grounds and invite even more use. There is also a small sinkhole that needs to be addressed and presents challenges for a new playground. It seems like Parks needs to use resources to solve these issues before upgrading the playground.

This is not to say an upgrade to the playground is unwanted. Our kids and their friends all desire a better playground, but they also desire a sledding hill free of obstructions and a field for open play. It makes more sense to keep the playground at or near the South end of the park to preserve the multi-use ability of the hill and the field. The more uses the park has the more people will visit the park.

Lastly, we are also concerned about the proposed trail. Much of Dodd road is closed to street parking. Adding a trail seems like an extra expense that will not invite additional use. Those resources could be used to reimagine the playground in its current location or add some other recreational resources that invite more users to a multi-use park.

We strongly urge the City to pause and to engage the neighborhood in working with you to re-imagining the park. In the past, we did attend a park advisory board meeting and asked the City to include neighbors during *the design phase* of park improvements and not only after decisions have been made. In addition to including adults, we'd love to see the City hold a "children's idea session" where we bring together neighborhood children to understand how they currently use the park and what ideas they have for improvement. We'd be happy to help organize such a session. Perhaps these events could be held at Kennedy park (allowing for more social distancing and greater local participation).

It makes more sense to keep the playground at the South end of the park to preserve the multi-use ability of the hill and the field. The more uses of the park means that the park can and will be used by a greater variety of neighbors.

We strongly encourage the park board and/or city council to conduct a listening session with the neighbors to learn what they think would be best for the park, since they are most likely to use the park.